

RECOGNIZING THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL SPINE HEALTH FOUNDATION

**HON. GERALD E. CONNOLLY**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, December 22, 2022*

Mr. CONNOLLY. Madam Speaker, I rise today to ask that my colleagues join me in congratulating the National Spine Health Foundation on its 20th anniversary.

In 2019, according to the Center for Disease Control, about 39 percent of the U.S. population suffered from chronic neck or back pain. Those numbers increased to 44.8 percent in adults below the federal poverty level. Back pain is also the number one cause of missed workdays, the leading cause of job-related disability and pain in the U.S., and the most common non-cancer related reason for an opioid prescription in the U.S. It is no small wonder that spine problems caused by inactivity and neglect during the COVID pandemic have resulted in increased opioid use for pain.

The National Spine Health Foundation is the only national patient-centered non-profit dedicated to helping patients overcome debilitating spinal conditions and take back their lives. During the past 20 years, the Foundation has developed award winning patient education, advocacy, and research to give patients the tools they need to make informed decisions about their spine health and navigate their own treatment journeys with confidence. It has been well documented that better-informed patients have better outcomes. Knowledge is powerful medicine.

The Foundation's Medical and Scientific Board includes 50 of the top spine specialists in the nation. These spine specialists provide their insight, knowledge, and expertise to help patients understand their options so they can make informed decisions concerning their spine wellness, problem prevention, and surgical and non-surgical treatments.

The Foundation has proven their commitment to spine health research. Patient-reported outcomes have been part of the NSHF fabric since its inception. As they are deeply invested in supporting evidence-based healthcare decision-making, it is important that they take part in finding this evidence. Their trademarked cloud-based 'Spine-online' research tool enables them to conduct multicenter studies and partner with research teams both in the U.S. and internationally, including active studies on robotic surgery, enhanced surgical recovery, augmented reality, stem cell therapy, and more.

Madam Speaker, in the U.S. and globally, musculoskeletal conditions affect more people than any other condition. I ask that my colleagues join me in congratulating the National Spine Health Foundation's 20-year commitment to all those individuals who suffer from spine and back issues.

HONORING FRANCES MUÑOZ, OUR NATION'S FIRST LATINA JUDGE

**HON. J. LUIS CORREA**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, December 22, 2022*

Mr. CORREA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Frances Muñoz, our Na-

tion's first Latina judge. Judge Frances Muñoz died on October 17, 2022, of natural causes. She was 92 years old.

Judge Frances Muñoz has the distinction of being the first Latina female appointed or elected to the bench in California and the first Latina female appointed or elected as a trial court jurist in the United States. She served for 23 years in the Orange County Municipal and Superior Courts and an additional 15 years as an Assigned Judge.

From humble beginnings, Frances was born at the height of the depression on September 18, 1930, the 5th of 11 children, in the mining town of Miami, Arizona. The family moved to Puritan, Colorado, and her father continued to work in the coal mines until the mines "played out."

In 1941, the family moved to Corona, California, and joined the thousands of others working in farm labor. Frances and her siblings joined their parents in the fields during the summers picking tomatoes, grapes, and other crops in the Fresno area, sometimes sleeping outdoors.

Judge Muñoz inspired her younger siblings to study and pursue higher education. After high school, she went to work selling furniture and she paid for the college expenses of her siblings.

Undaunted, Judge Muñoz pursued her own education by attending night classes at Los Angeles City College, UCLA and law school while managing Atlas Furniture stores during the day. In 1972, Judge Muñoz received her law degree from Southwestern University School of Law where she was a member of Law Review.

She moved to Orange County, where her brother Greg, a graduate from USC law school, had opened a practice. Greg later became an Orange County Superior Court judge and served alongside Frances on the bench.

In 1972, Frances joined the office of the Orange County Public Defender, where she was the first Latina and the second woman to be hired in that office.

In 1974, she and several Latino attorneys established the Orange County Mexican-American Lawyers Club, which was later renamed the Hispanic Bar Association of Orange County. One of their goals was to ensure that more Latinos, who were qualified and experienced, be appointed or elected to the bench. As a result of their efforts, today there are 19 Latino judges out of 124 Superior Court Judges on the Orange County bench and two Latino justices out of eight Appellate Court justices in Orange County.

On January 25, 1978, Governor Jerry Brown's office telephoned Frances Muñoz to advise her that she had been appointed as a Judge in the Harbor Municipal County in Orange County. She was not at her desk. She was in court representing a defendant in a felony jury trial.

As a Deputy Public Defender, she was known as a zealous advocate. But she was also noted for being civil with opposing counsel and respectful of the court. She was also acknowledged for creating and meticulously cataloging 3x5 cards in a small box. On each card she wrote out the facts and holding of the appellate court in key cases involving "furtive gestures," "search of trunk," and other criminal law issues. She would quickly retrieve a key citation during a motion or trial.

Within months of her appointment, she was opposed by a male Deputy District Attorney.

Several Harbor Municipal Court judges, and multitudes of Orange County attorneys, court staff, bailiffs, police officers, and clergy rallied around her to host fundraisers and to support her in the retention election. Her 10 brothers and sisters and their children and parishioners from her church, St. Joachim Catholic Church in Costa Mesa, canvassed neighborhoods to get out the vote. In that 1980 election, Judge Frances Muñoz was retained with the largest plurality of votes of any challenged judge in the state. Four other judges in Orange County lost their seats that year. She was never challenged again.

In 1980 and 1990 she was elected the Supervising Judge of the Harbor Municipal Court and in 1990 was also recognized as the Outstanding Judge of the Year by the Orange County Women Lawyers Association. In 1976, she co-founded the Orange County Hispanic Education Endowment Fund which awards college scholarships to Latino scholars.

In 2001, Judge Muñoz retired from the bench, but continued her public service as an assigned judge until 2016. She also served on the board of directors of THINK—Teaching, Helping, Instructing Kids and boards of other non-profit organizations.

Every Thursday she would tutor students at Santa Ana's Madison Elementary school. She was also a keen real estate investor who purchased several commercial and residential properties. She always accommodated nieces and nephews in her spacious Corona Del Mar home while they studied and earned their bachelors, masters or medical degrees at the University of California, Irvine.

Judge Muñoz is survived by four sisters, Margaret Muñoz, Vera Muñoz-Harrison, Rosie Schirling, and Angie Quintana, and 25 nieces and nephews and 45 great nieces and nephews.

Please join me in celebrating the long, accomplished life of Judge Frances Muñoz. She will be remembered for her perseverance in the face of adversity, excellence as a law student, attorney and judge, for her lifetime dedication to public service and children's education, and for her compassionate and gracious spirit.

HONORING THE SERVICE YASHA NIKITIN

**HON. MICHELLE STEEL**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, December 22, 2022*

Mrs. STEEL. Madam Speaker, today I honor the career and accomplishments of one of my constituents.

Yasha Nikitin has dutifully served the City of Huntington Beach and its police force for over 20 years. In his time with HBPd, he has protected our community as a police explorer, a student worker, a police cadet, an officer, and a sergeant. He has also served his fellow officers as a board member and president of the Huntington Beach Police Officer Association.

On January 10th, after all of his years of service protecting our friends and neighbors, Yasha will be promoted to Police Lieutenant. Our police are vital to the safety and success of our communities, and we are incredibly fortunate to have as fine a person as Yasha serving on the Huntington Beach Police force.